

***Delphinium leucophaeum* Greene**

pale larkspur

Ranunculaceae (Buttercup Family)

Status: State Endangered, USFWS Species of Concern

Rank: G2QS1

General Description: A slender perennial that grows from a cluster of small bulbs. The flowering stems range from 8 inches to 2 feet in height. The leaves are distributed evenly along the stem and the lower ones are divided palmately into 5 lobes. The flower head may have from 6 to 30 individual flowers. The flowers range from white to cream colored and the petals may have lavender edges.

Identification Tips: *D. leucophaeum* and *D. pavonaceum* are the only white or cream colored larkspurs west of the Cascades. *D. pavonaceum* has a longer spur and glandular-pubescent petals. *D. leucophaeum* is not glandular or pubescent.

Phenology: Flowers from May through June and fruits from May to August.

Range: Northern Willamette Valley in western Oregon and one site in Lewis County, Washington in the Puget Trough physiographic province.

Habitat: Undisturbed sites on dry bluffs, open ground, and moist lowland meadows within the Western Hemlock Zone of Franklin and Dyrness (1973). Now largely restricted to roadside ditches and fence rows. Associated species include Garry oak (*Quercus garryana*), oceanspray (*Holodiscus discolor*), licorice fern (*Polypodium glycorrhiza*), broadleaf stonecrop (*Sedum spathulifolium*), red fescue (*Festuca rubra*), blue wildrye (*Elymus glaucus*), snowberry (*Symphoricarpos albus*), and hardhack (*Spiraea douglasii*). Elevation: 125 to 200 feet.

Ecology: Seeds germinate in the winter to produce cotyledons on a slender stem. Seedlings may not develop further during the first year and second year plants consist of only one small leaf with three leaflets approximately the same size as the first year seedlings. The above ground portion of both first and second year plants usually dies back by late spring. Two or more leaves

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Known distribution of
Delphinium
leucophaeum
in Washington



● Current (1980+)

○ Historic (older than 1980)

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Ed Maxwell



John Gamon

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Ecology (continued): with 5 leaflets are likely by the third year. Individuals generally do not flower for at least five years under field conditions. The Washington site is dominated by non-native grasses which may have a significant negative impact on seedling establishment.

State Status Comments: There is only one population known in Washington, west of Chehalis. This population has declined in recent years and is undergoing ongoing threats.

Inventory Needs: Remnant habitat fragments in southwestern WA should continue to be inventoried.

Threats and Management Concerns: Maintenance of the roadside vegetation is a primary concern for this species in WA. Past herbicide applications have taken a toll. Due to the dominance of these areas by non-native grasses, mowing at an appropriate time after seed set may be required to reduce competition. Past conversion of the land to agricultural and residential use probably resulted in significant losses of habitat and plants.

Comments: This taxon is treated as *Delphinium nuttallii* ssp. *ochroleucum* in the *Flora of North America* (see below).

References:

Flora of North America Editorial Committee, eds. 1997. *Flora of North America North of Mexico. Volume 3 Magnoliophyta: Magnoliidae and Hamamelidae*. Treatment of the genus *Delphinium* (p. 196-240) by M.J. Warnock. Oxford University Press, New York. 590 pp.

Hitchcock, C.L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, and J.W. Thompson. 1964. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest, Part 2: Salicaceae to Saxifragaceae*. University of Washington Press, Seattle. 597 pp.